The Pagan Library

A Healing Myth

Nihasa

This story can have a powerful healing effect when read out loud (or recorded and then played) to someone suffering from a phobia or other effect of childhood trauma. While names, settings, and style can be varied to suit individual tastes, the sequence which the apprentice describes, the sequence the princess goes through, and the vagueness of the "bad thing" descriptions should remain unchanged and no element of the story should be left out.

Once, in another time and another place, a kingdom of magic and beauty knew a time of peace. No armies threatened its boarders, no bandits plundered its trade routes, no plagues sickened its people. Yet even in such peaceful times, bad things could happen: accidents, misunderstandings, even good people doing bad things.

The third daughter of the king was a bright and cheerful sort. She wasn't the strongest or the prettiest of the royal princesses, but she did have the nicest wings of anyone her age. She loved to fly around the countryside and explore the groves and meadows she found they were always full of surprises.

One day she found a particularly pretty grove, with a pond glistening in a little clearing in the middle. As she went in for a closer look, she saw images start to form. She saw her own reflection, and as she lightly touched the ground she saw that her reflection was watching reflections of her own dim watery reflections from her past.

"So you can see the pictures." The voice from among the trees made her jump. "Don't worry," continued the young man as he stepped out from among the trees, "nobody else can see the same images, Princess. It's part of the magic."

"How?" she asked, looking him up and down. He was a young man, no older than the princess herself, dressed in the rough tunic of a wizard's apprentice. "Who are you? How did you know who I am, what I saw?"

"I am apprenticed to the Court Wizard. Everybody knows who you are, Princess and besides, I have seen you at the palace when I have been there with my master." He paused, glancing at the ground and lowering his voice. "As to the images well, at one time I had need of their magic."

"When I entered the Wizard's service, I had a great and secret fear. Something bad happened to me when I was younger. It hurt to even think about, and after time I didn't think about it much. But ever since that time, I had lived with the fear. When my master learned of this, he taught me the magic of this pool and its stream."

"The pool reflects images from your mind scenes from your past, dreams of the future, even fantasies of the present. The stream flows like time itself, upstream into the past, and downstream into the future. If I followed the ritual he described, these magics could wash clean the fear."

She made a face. "I suppose this ritual involves deep magics usable only by Wizards?"

"Not really. All the magic is in the waters, and anyone can use the ritual. Even a lowly apprentice." He grinned. "It's pretty simple. After he told me about it, he brought me here and then stood back by the trees. He said that he would answer any questions I had but otherwise I was on my own."

"I stood where I could see my reflection in the pool, and then thought about my fear. As I thought, my reflection watched a reflection of my thoughts like a stage where dimly lit actors played out the scene against a colorless backdrop. I looked up and saw that I was still here, in the glade. I looked back at the water, holding on to a small part of the special feeling of fear it had given me. As I turned and looked back upstream, I saw more images each earlier than the last. I relaxed and let the feeling guide me back to the earliest image. When I had that, I turned back to the pool and found my reflection watching the same colorless players in their dim reflection of the memory. As my reflection watched, the image went from a time shortly before the bad thing happened, through the whole thing, and on to a time when it was all over. When it passed the ending that way, it stopped like a drawing. Then the drawing faded away, and I was just looking at my reflection. The Wizard had told me that if I stepped into that last part of the image, it would run very quickly backwards, with full color and sound and me living backwards through it all the way through to the part before the beginning. It sounded very strange. As I looked at my reflection again, it was watching the image go forward again in its dim, colorless way. When it reached the drawing at the end, I stepped into the image and was plunged into a world going backwards! It went clear through to before the beginning in less than a second, then stopped. Startled, I let the water carry me downstream, through all that had happened since, with the fear gone and the memory unable to hurt me. When I reached the here-and-now, I got out and just stood there, knowing that the fear would trouble me no more." He stopped, and suddenly seemed to remember where he was, and who he was talking to. "That was over a year ago, and the fear is still gone. The Wizard says it is gone for good."

She thought for a moment. "So all there is to this ritual is think of the problem until your reflection sees it, follow a part of the feeling upstream to my earliest memory of it, wait for my reflection to see it all the way through, step into the ending, and live it backwards quickly? What kind of magic is that?"

He thought for a minute, shrugged, and said "Effective? If you wish, I will withdraw to the trees while you try it."

"What makes you think that I NEED it?"

"Because the images only come to those who do." His voice faded to an embarrassed silence as he realized what he had said. "I'll go now."

"Yes, do." She said absently, already thinking. Then: "But not too far, in case I need you." She was remembering an incident a few days back which had set off her special fear, and just as the apprentice had described, her reflection in the pool was watching a dim and watery scene of the memory. Startled, she looked up again. Yes, she was in the clearing, with the trees all around and the apprentice all but lost among the closer ones. She could still feel a part of that fear, so she kept that feeling while she looked back up stream at all the images from the past that the feeling had touched until she found the earliest of them all. She brought that memory back to the pool and released it as her reflection started to watch it unfold in its dim and watery way. Her reflection seemed to have a life of its own as it watched the pale scene start before anything happened, run through the bad parts, and then pause at a time when it was all over. She watched her reflection shift as she prepared for what she would do. Her reflection settled as it watched the scene unfold again. The dim scene passed through the beginning, through the bad time and on past again. When it stopped, she jumped in to it. Suddenly, she was there again: back where and when it had happened. Everything was moving backwards, and in a flash she had lived backwards through it and past the beginning. Shocked, she let the water carry her down stream, forward through all the rest of her yesterdays without the bad

times for company. When she got to today, she stood up. There she was standing, dripping in a stream in the clearing. She looked around for the apprentice, half expecting him to be laughing at the soggy mess she must be. He was there, by the trees not laughing, just smiling in an understanding way.

In the years that followed, they became friends. Although they went their separate ways he, as wizard to one of the King's high lords and she as wife to a neighboring prince they valued that friendship to the end of their days. And from that time on, neither was ever again troubled by their great fears.

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